

George McGregor Cabin  
On the left bank of the Yukon River,  
approximately 2 miles downriver  
from Coal Creek  
Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve  
Circle vicinity  
Alaska

HABS No. AK-43

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AK,  
23-CIRC.V,  
1-

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20013-7127

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### GEORGE MCGREGOR CABIN

HABS No. AK-43

Location: Left bank of Yukon River, approximately 2 miles downriver from Coal Creek, 4 miles upriver from Woodchopper Creek, approximately 60 miles upriver from Circle in the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, Alaska.

USGS Charley River Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates: 07.7249000.401040.

Present Owner: U.S. Government.

Present Use: Vacant.

Significance: George McGregor, a miner-turned-trapper, built this cabin in 1938. McGregor staked some of the richest ground on Woodchopper Creek in the 1920s. He sold out in the 1930s and turned to trapping. His modest cabin, which he also used as his fish camp, is representative of the small log cabins built by solitary trappers.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1938, according to Charlie Biederman.
2. Builder: Probably built by George McGregor for himself.
3. Original and subsequent owners: McGregor was the only person who ever lived here.
4. Original plan and construction: This is a tightly constructed, well-made one-room cabin, measuring approximately 14' x 14'. It is constructed of unpeeled logs, which are hewn slightly on the interior and saddlenotched. The roof is sod on split poles, with planks on top of that, covered by tarpaper and some corrugated tin. There was a central ventilator and a corner chimney. The ridgepole extended 11'-4" in front to support a corrugated tin roof, forming a porch.
5. Alterations and additions: The flooring has been removed. The porch roof has collapsed.

6. Outbuildings:

- a. Cabin ruin: The cabin ruin east of the main cabin, consisting of about seven courses of logs, may have actually been a tent frame. Canvas, some of it wrapped around metal poles, remains in the ruins.
- b. Cache: A cache, raised nearly 10' on posts, is located approximately 250' southeast of the cabin. It has a split-pole floor and a tent frame of poles. Some canvas remains. McGregor referred to this cache in a 1945 diary entry, when flood waters from break-up were threatening his cabin: "May 19. Packed grub back to big cache."

B. Historical Context:

Long before he built this cabin, George McGregor was a miner on Woodchopper Creek. He was at Woodchopper by 1923 (Ott & Scheele to G. McGregor, September 5, 1923). In 1926, he and his partner Frank Rossback staked the discovery claim and several others on Mineral Creek, a tributary of Woodchopper. From 1928 to 1935, McGregor staked five claims on Woodchopper (Circle District Mining Locations: 5:178, 184, 185, 309, 310, 572, 606). Mineral Creek had been prospected and mined early in the century:

Five miles from the Yukon, Mineral Creek, the scene of some placer mining, joins Woodchopper Creek from the south. Though Mineral Creek was staked as early as 1898, actual mining did not begin until several years later. In 1906, 18 men were engaged in mining on this creek and more or less work was done on seven claims. Most of the work was done by "shoveling in" methods, but one small hydraulic plant was used for stripping and three steam hoists were operated. Most of the mining was done in winter with the aid of steam points. The total production for 1906 is estimated to have been \$18,000, of which four-fifths was taken out in winter (Brooks, 203-4).

In 1911, the U.S. Geological Survey stated:

The incomplete data on hand indicate that the value of the total gold production of the region [Woodchopper to Fourth of July Creeks] is less than \$150,000, the greater part of which has come from Mineral Creek, a tributary of Woodchopper, and from Fourth of July Creek" (Prindle and Mertie, 201).

Apparently, these Mineral Creek claims were not kept active, allowing McGregor to come along in the mid-1920s and stake them again. In 1925, the U.S.G.S. noted:

Little active mining is in progress on Woodchopper and Coal creeks. The chief placer mining during the summer of 1925 was on Mineral Creek, a small right-hand tributary of Woodchopper Creek, about five miles from the Yukon....The pay streak is about 100 feet wide, and the gravel and muck are about 10 feet thick. Mining was being done by open cutting, aided by a small nozzle (Mertie, #816, 165).

In the mid-1930s, McGregor sold out to Ernest Patty, who represented Alluvial Gold, Inc. Alluvial Gold, the sister company of Gold Placers, Inc., which bought up claims on Coal Creek, acquired the active claims on Woodchopper and established a camp near Iron Creek, about 1½ miles up Woodchopper from Mineral Creek. There they introduced a dredge, bringing methods to placer mining that small-scale miners could not afford.

When McGregor relinquished his mining interests, he turned to trapping. Because he needed dogs to use as transportation for trapping, he fished in the summers to provide dog food. McGregor built this cabin in 1938 and used it as his fish camp. He also used it as his base of operations in the winter, but had several other cabins on his traplines. According to his diary, he built a cabin at an unspecified location in 1945 (September 30-October 13) and another one at Andrews Creek in 1946 (August 9-September 9).

George McGregor's diaries, from 1943-1962, are in the collection of the Eagle Historical Society. Although each day's entry is extremely brief, usually reduced to a word or two, they evoke the life of a solitary trapper/fisherman. A day of high drama is described like this: "To little cabin. caught fox. wolf ate it. caught wolf. broke chain. got away" (December 1, 1945). Poetry is mixed with the mundane: "Split wood. Saw first Butterfly. heard Cranes. Bottled Beer" (May 8, 1945). Break-up one year, and the planting of his garden, is recorded in these entries for 1945:

- May 17. River raising.
- May 18. YUKON BROKE 1:30 P.M. water in cellar. 2 motor plane up and back. water nearly to cabin. Fish rack broke.
- May 19. Packed grub back to big cache.
- May 20. Ice still in river.
- May 21. nothing.
- May 22. up on point with glasses. Lots of ice up and down river on banks.
- May 23. ice still running.
- May 24. Baked bread. Cut axle for wheel. lots of drift and ice running.
- May 25. Not much ice running today.
- May 26. Spadeing garden.
- May 27. Bent Toboggin.

May 28. Finished spading garden.  
May 29. Launched boat.  
May 30. Planted spuds. Rain all day.  
May 31. Down slough can't get around. river raised.  
Finished plant garden.

Trapping involves setting traps in a circuitous route and checking them constantly. McGregor trapped from Woodchopper over to Coal Creek over to Hannah Creek, where he had a cabin (Biederman). His diary describes this peripatetic life, as in these sample entries from 1944:

Oct. 30. Snow this afternoon.  
Oct. 31. To Woodchopper crossing. Set 8 traps.  
Nov. 1. Fixed sleigh and harness.  
Nov. 2. To J with dogs first time. Got  $\frac{1}{2}$  caribou. caught a mink.  
Nov. 3. Foggy. Set trap on island.  
Nov. 4. To J. Got load hay.  
Nov. 5. To Woodchopper crossing. Saw coyote in slough.  
Nov. 6. Set 2 traps on archies island.  
Nov. 7. Baked bread. Set 2 traps down slough. Put perishables in cellar. Saw wolf across River.  
Nov. 8. To Woodchopper crossing. Set 3 traps. Saw fox.  
Nov. 9. To camp.  
Nov. 10. Layed over  $-10^{\circ}$ .  
Nov. 11. To Jacks  $-20^{\circ}$ .  
Nov. 12. To slough. can't cross, River froze last night  $-30^{\circ}$ .  
  
Dec. 1. To Woodchopper slough. set 2 traps. caught fox. Foggy.  
Dec. 2. caught cross fox.  
Dec. 3. To foothill. set 6 traps. total 23.  
Dec. 4. To slough across river. no luck.  
Dec. 5.  $-34^{\circ}$  this evening.  
  
Jan. 2. To traps at foothills. Wolverine  $-10^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 3. To traps in slough across river  $-20^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 4.  $-40^{\circ}$  tonight.  
Jan. 5.  $-40^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 6.  $-36^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 7. To traps woodchopper weasle  $-20^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 8. Baked bread  $-26^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 9. To Archies island  $-20^{\circ}$ .  
Jan. 10. To traps at foothill  $-10$ .  
Jan. 11. To traps up woodchopper  $-10$ .  
Jan. 12. To traps across river. Fox twisted foot off. got away.

In the summer, McGregor had a fishwheel and fished to provide food for his dogs, as well as to sell. Art Reynolds, who lived over on Sam Creek, recorded buying fish from him (August 18, 1941, and August 29, 1943) and Louise Paul, whose husband worked for Patty at Woodchopper and Coal creeks, also remembered buying fish from him. When the fish were running, McGregor's diary recorded only the number of fish per day. Here are the entries for a week in 1944:

July 18. 52 fish. mail down 9 PM.  
July 19. 55 fish.  
July 20. 55 fish. Ames down.  
July 21. 54 fish.  
July 22. 34 fish.  
July 23. 23 fish.  
July 24. 24 fish.

In separate entries, the close of the season is noted:

Aug. 19. 2 or 3 silvers, first.  
Aug. 23. Bale fish.  
Aug. 25. Bale fish. Lit lamp first time this fall.  
Aug. 26. 2 or 3 fish. no more kings.  
Sept. 22. 9 fish. got bear down by island. stopped wheel.  
Sept. 24. Pulled up basket....  
Sept. 25. Pulled everything from water.

Although McGregor lived alone, he was obviously part of a community. About a dozen people appear regularly in his diary, often identified only by first name. He sold fish to his neighbors and was visited regularly. In the summer of 1954, McGregor moved to Eagle. He served on the common council from 1955-57 and 1961-63, and as election judge from 1955-58 and 1960-61 (Scott). In 1963, he left Alaska.

## PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### A. Interviews:

Biederman, Charlie. Interviewed by Steve Ulvi and author, July 16, 1985. Tape in collection of Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve.

Paul, Louise. Interviewed by Don Chase and author, July 20, 1985.

### B. Bibliography:

#### 1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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2. Secondary and published sources:

Brooks, Alfred H. "The Circle Precinct." in Alfred H. Brooks, et al., Mineral Resources of Alaska in 1906. USGS Bulletin #314. Washington: GPO, 1907.

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Mertie, J. B., Jr. Geology of the Eagle-Circle District, Alaska. USGS Bulletin # 816. Washington: GPO, 1930.

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Scott, Elva R. "Roster of Eagle Area Residents, 1897 to present." Typescript, 1981. Collection of Eagle Historical Society.